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# **The ESDP and Its Challenges**

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# The ESDP and Its Challenges

**Dr. Yves Boyer**

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The concept of “European defence” dates back to the aftermath of WWII. With the Brussels treaty<sup>1</sup>, France, the United Kingdom and the Benelux countries gave flesh to this project in concluding a defensive alliance aimed at countering the growing threat emanating from the Soviet Union. The European allies began to set up a military structure in order to be able to plan and execute military operation if necessary. The lack of resources rapidly compelled the Europeans to knock at Washington’s door in order to keep the Americans committed to the defence of Western Europe. When creating the military integrated structure of the Atlantic alliance, it was obvious that a pre-eminent role would be then given, in the alliance, to the US both in term of leadership as well in military affairs. As a consequence of that situation the signatories of the Brussels treaty renounced their own military arrangement to the benefit of Nato.

A second attempt to built a new form of “European defence”, although within the framework of the Atlantic alliance and without British participation, was initiated through the EDC project (European Defence Community). The scheme failed in the summer of 1954 when the French parliament rejected the idea however originated in France.

After that failure, the European construction was then re-focused on its civilian aspects as laid out in the Rome treaty which initial purpose was about economic and trade integration among the members states of the newly created EEC (European Economic Community).

The changing of the international scene in the 80’s called for a transformation of the EEC. In addition, growing frictions between the West Europeans and the US since the early 70’s; the realization that the gap between the two sides of the Atlantic in trade and GNP<sup>2</sup> was going to be closing did call for adjustment in the various domains covered by the transatlantic relationship. In many fields if the Europeans became key players as exemplified in high tech products such as mobile telephony (GSM standards), Airbus, Ariane space launcher, etc.... they still remained excessively dependent on the US in defence matters. In addition, the growing sense of unity among EEC countries reinforced the idea that sooner than later they would have to re-start the plans for a European defence.

The initial move resulted from an initiative of the Belgian and French Governments which led to the “Rome Declaration”<sup>3</sup> calling for a WEU’s reactivation since *“the continuing necessity to strengthen western security, and the better utilization of WEU would not only contribute to the*

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<sup>1</sup> March 25, 1948. Conceived largely as a response to Soviet moves to impose control over the countries of Central Europe, the Treaty represented the first attempt to translate into practical arrangements some of the ideals of the European movement. Its main feature was the commitment to mutual defence should any of the signatories be the victim of an armed attack in Europe. In September 1948, military co-operation was initiated in the framework of the Brussels Treaty Organisation. A plan for common defence was adopted, involving the integration of air defences and a joint command organisation with marshal Montgomery as the commander in chief.

<sup>2</sup> In 1961 the combined GNP of the then 6 members of the EEC amounted to roughly 37% of the US GNP. Forty years later the combined GNP of those 6 members amounted to 54% of the US and to 87% when combined with the others countries of the EU at 15.

*security of Western Europe but also to an improvement in the common defence of all the countries of the Atlantic Alliance". From that starting point, the Franco-German entente led to resurrect the idea of a "European defence" which became a new goal for the West Europeans. As stated in "The Hague Platform on European Security"<sup>4</sup> preamble "We recall our commitment to build a European Union in accordance with the Single European Act, which we all signed as Members of the European Community. We are convinced that the construction of an integrated Europe will remain incomplete as long as it does not include security and defence".*

The growing interdependence within the EEC, the transformation of the international scene and the strategic upheavals of the early 90's led to acknowledging that the European construction has to be considerably deepened to remain effective in coping with new issues and challenges. The Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties led to the European Union which transformed qualitatively the European project initially based on functional development of the EEC into a full political project aimed at creating an unprecedented type, in historical terms, of confederation/federation between sovereign States. The aims are to enhance and maximize the benefits of the Union for its citizen, its economy, its prosperity and makes the EU a full part actor on the world stage when new risks and challenges may deeply affect international stability and its own security. It was then agreed that the EU needed to be able to work on the international scene with one voice and be able to back its diplomacy by military means. The Maastricht and the Amsterdam treaties defined in broad terms the scope and the purpose of the future ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy). Even if the purpose of ESDP was laid out and the legal basis for its completion were agreed in the early 90's, the project appeared initially deadlocked due to political and strategical divergences on how to proceed and how far should the Europeans go in terms of ESDP. The real start of ESDP was concretely initiated at the Franco-British meeting in Saint-Malo in December 1998 which opened the doors for a first cycle of European defence integration which was unfortunately closed by the Iraqi crisis.

### **Today how can be described the state of ESDP?**

Firstly, the EU do possess an agenda which is to give the EU a say in world affairs :*"We, the members of the European Council, are resolved that the European Union shall play its full role on the international stage"*<sup>5</sup>. It implies in military affairs that the EU acquires the capacities and the capabilities, at the strategic level, to independently assess a crisis, assess its potential military implications, to plans if necessary military operation and execute this operation in using European

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<sup>3</sup> October 27, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> October 27, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> European Council declaration on Strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defence, Cologne European Council, 3-4 June 1999.

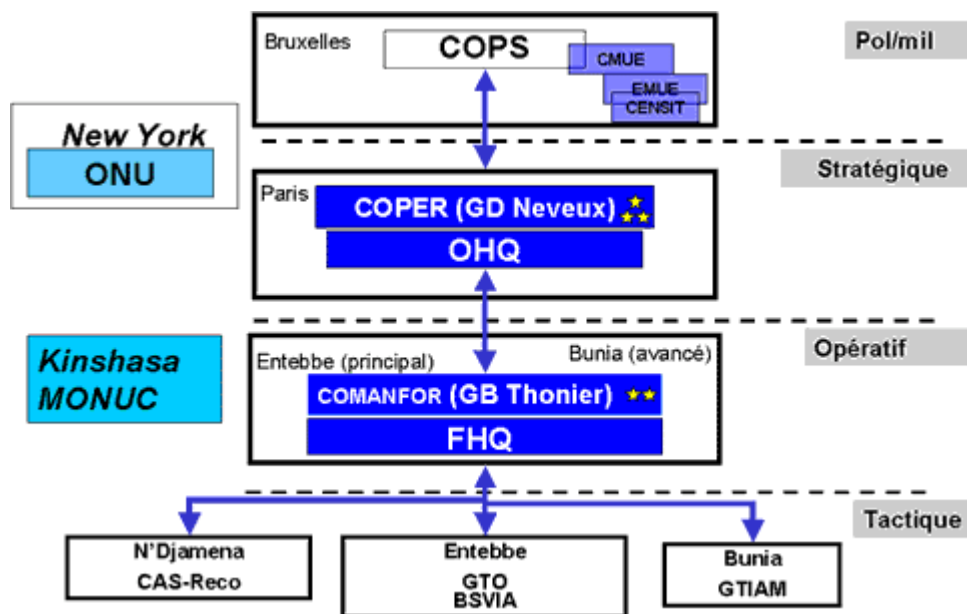
assets: “..we are convinced that the Council should have the ability to take decisions on the full range of conflict prevention and crisis management....This requires a capacity for autonomous action backed up by credible military capabilities and appropriate decision making bodies... the EU will need a capacity for analysis of situations, sources of intelligence, and a capability for relevant strategic planning”<sup>6</sup>. Such emphasis on of autonomous action have enormous consequences in implicitly orienting EU members towards developing appropriate political-military structures as well as military tools to fulfil the goals assigned to ESDP.

Accordingly, this is the second feature of ESDP, today, the Europeans have set up relevant political-military structures to assess, decide, plan and implement military operations. Although, they are in their infancy, these structures have been tested at the occasion of two military operations: *Concordia* and *Artemis*. *Concordia* has been a EU military operation with Nato assets launched after the UNSC vote resolution 1371 at the request of FRYM president for stabilizing a complex situation in Western part of Macedonia. A small EU force (about 400 men) was dispatched under a command structure which was provided at the strategic level by Nato (EU led operation with Nato support). This was made possible after the EU finally reached an agreement with Nato regarding the implementation of EU led military operation when using Nato assets, i.e. basically US assets. This the recent completion of the Berlin Plus agreement. The political control and strategic directive were provided by the PSC (*Standing Political and Security Committee*) of the EU when the commander of the operation at the strategic level was provided by Nato when an EU OHQ (Operational Headquarters) was set up at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe) under the supervision of the deputy SACEUR (Admiral Feist, a European Officer). The command of the force in Macedonia was established in Skopje (general Maral[FR]).

In the case of operation *Artemis*, the operation was fully controlled and managed by the Europeans. The European Union (EU) launched the operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1484 (May 30, 2003) and the Council's Joint Action adopted on June 5, 2003. The Operation ended officially on 1st September 2003. The UN Resolution authorised the deployment of an interim emergency multinational force in Bunia (Ituri region in DRC) until September 1, 2003. The purpose of the operation was aimed at contributing to the stabilisation of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Bunia. France acted as the "Framework Nation" for the operation and used some component of its strategic command structure (the CPCO- *Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Operations*) which was “Europeanised” with the inclusion of about 30 officers coming from EU's countries in complement of the 50 French officers involved. An operational EU HQ was also established in Entebbe (Uganda) to directly command the operation:

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Since then, those objectives have been reiterated at various European Council meetings.



As a sign of deeper commitment of European countries for the sake of ESDP, it shall be noticed that, at the occasion of operation *Artemis*, Sweden, for operational duties, dispatched, for the first time, some of its special forces in the heart of Africa. The case of Sweden is particularly noticeable since it highlights the present dilemma facing many medium sized countries in the EU. Strong tendencies still exist about maintaining the traditional defence policy of Sweden, strong inclination are also manifested towards the USA in military affairs but now Stockholm also expresses the growing sense that Sweden cannot be left out on what is going on in ESDP. In the field of defence industries, in the field of force's transformation, Sweden is slowly moving towards a growing implication in ESDP.

Last point to be rapidly mentioned about the state of ESDP: progress has also been made in the field of restructuring the European defence industrial base around Thalès, EADS and BAE for the electronic and aerospace industries. Movements are being made to rationalize soon naval industries with the possible creation of a new giant around Thalès-HDW and possibly Spanish and Italian shipyards. Progresses have also been made in setting-up a common agency for defining common requirement and common production.

### What are the challenges ahead?

The first challenge for the Europeans is to remain able to cope with the ongoing military-technical revolution: new complex weapon systems are needed particularly in the field of intelligence, planning military operation and information dominance. This will require

to develop and built complex weapons systems. To reach that capability the Europeans will have in a concrete manner to overcome the difficult question of pulling together our R&T resources in the context of low defence spending. Limits on defence spending will probably led, at the occasion of a future new cycle of deepening ESDP towards mutualisation of forces and later on force specialisation having then defined common doctrine and operational guidance.

European countries, will be also confronted with the question of compatibility of their force posture with the American one either within Nato or in the framework of ESDP. If Washington is moving towards the “transformation” of part of its military forces, what shall be the European attitude? Should the Europeans, for the sake of interoperability, follow US leads when no single European nation have enough resources to develop a full “transformational” force? Would it be satisfactorily to have only "niches" in the US "system of systems"? Would it be compatible with the place and role EU wishes to play on the international scene if it remains only capable of providing forces, mainly on the ground, dependant of intelligence and flows of data processed by US forces? A situation close to what was the status of colonial forces serving in British and French armies during the colonial period.

The question there is not so much linked to the future characteristic of armed conflicts but on the political significance of military choices. Indeed, there are already enough know-how and experiences in Europe about the various type of military conflicts from peace keeping operations to high intensity combat as well as high-tech know-how to develop a military posture within ESDP which does not need to mirror the US posture but, more fundamentally, relates directly to the political and strategic needs of the EU.

Already, gradually the Europeans are, either nationally or collectively, developing tools that will be of paramount importance in the future to fulfil the goals of strategic autonomy. As an example, in the domain of intelligence satellites, they will have about 15 reconnaissance satellites (including dual-use ones) in the next 5 years. In navigation systems the development of the Galileo satellite system will give a tremendous impetus to what will be possible, autonomously, by European forces from pure navigation to planning long range strike. Step by step the European defence is thus on the move. As acknowledged in a *Financial Times* editorial about Galileo “*the way to gain more autonomy from the US without further worsening transatlantic ties lies in concrete measures*”<sup>7</sup>.

Besides reaching a political consensus to move on in the domain of ESDP, the second challenge will be about reconciling very different situation in military affairs throughout European

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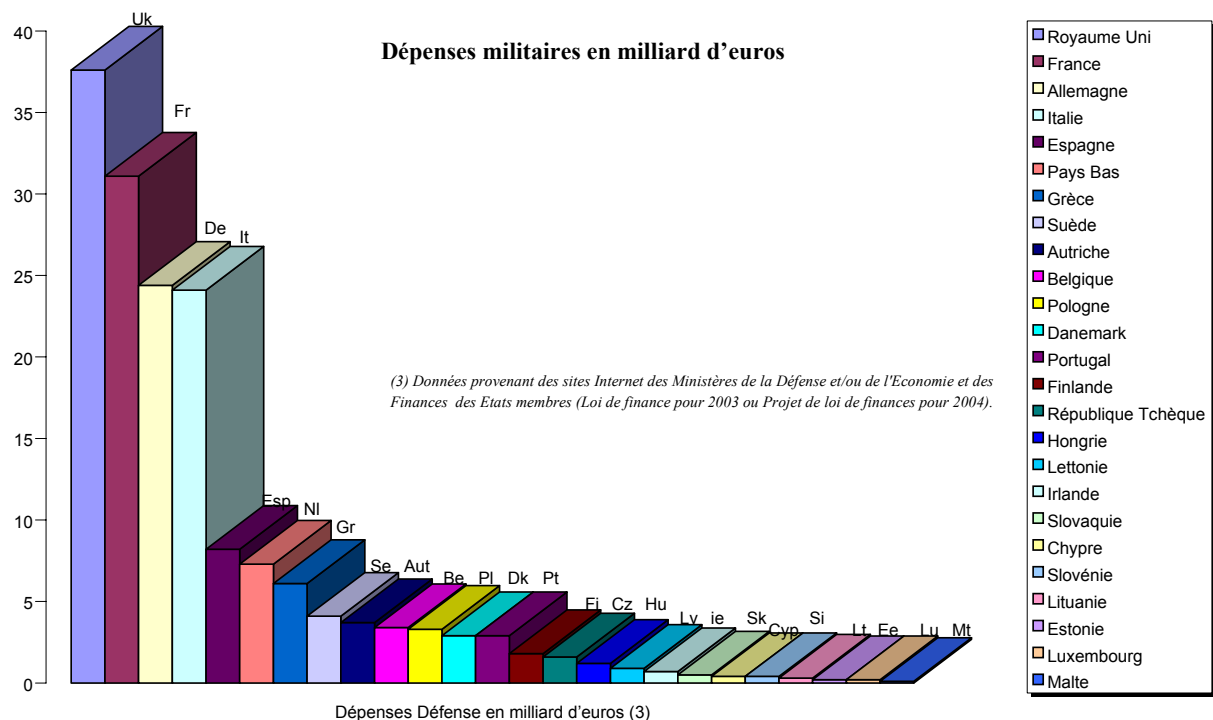
<sup>7</sup> “Galileo gathers pace”, *Financial Times*, September 22, 2003.

Union. Indeed, how will it be possible to make further progress when exists in Europe a huge heterogeneity of situation: in manpower, in defence budget, and in capacities. Of course, each nation of the EU has an equal say to the development of the European defence. The principle of reality comes however to affect that perspective. In military affairs, only very few EU's countries have capabilities to plan and execute military operations at the strategic and operative level. Most of them have now so few resources that they can, at best, only act at the upper level of tactical engagement but certainly not above. This objective situation leaves huge responsibilities on a very limited number of countries to push and lead for further development of EU military capabilities at the various spectrum of military activities.

No country is in the capacity to kill the process, but only few countries, among EU members, are capable to give it its new momentum. In that perspective the role of new EU's members will be of very great importance and as such highly scrutinized. Will they play with subtlety and creativity and bring their specific qualities to enrich the process? Or, will they stick to ideological and conservative position that will create useless obstruction that may prove, at the end, counterproductive to their overall interest in the EU?







## Conclusion

The development of a genuine European defence does not avoid the traditional political difficulties related to the European construction. Different understanding of the nature of the EU are not only related to different interest they are also directly linked to different historical experience within the European construction. Few countries are in the process since almost fifty five years, some are not even full members of the Union. As recently mentioned by Jacques Chirac: *“Europe...is not a freeway on which everyone can move fast. It is a steep and difficult mountain....some walk a bit faster, some more slowly because they are tired, others twist their ankles in a hole. But, we have never turned back”*<sup>8</sup>. This is the case in various domains like trade, economy and monetary affairs as illustrated with the present status of the *euro*.

The prospect that, for a certain period of time heterogeneity will prevail in the field of high tech industries, military power etc. will almost certainly led, regarding ESDP, to the apparition of a “pioneer group”. The Brussels meeting of April 2002 deciding the creation of a

strategic headquarters at Tervuren (Belgium) left open to the others members of the EU is a foretaste of that evolution.

Britain, due to the present limitations on its strategic freedom of manoeuvre, as a price to its special relationship with the US, will however certainly join the process but later although already having an eye on what is planned to give birth to this inevitable process. If Britain still remains, at least vocally, opposed to plans to set up a new EU military HQ, it now acknowledges that "structured cooperation" outlined in the draft of the EU constitution should be possible in defence. At the September 2003 meeting between Gerhard Schröder Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair the three leaders indeed agreed that *"The European Union should be endowed with a joint capacity to plan and conduct operations without recourse to Nato resource and capabilities. Our goal remains to achieve such a planning and implementation capacity either by consensus with the 25 [members states] but also in a circle of interested partners"*<sup>9</sup>.

Such cooperation would let any members of the EU who wanted to forge ahead with defence initiatives without waiting for the agreement of non-participants. A second cycle of European defence construction will then be opened. Only few countries will initially take part to the game but sooner than later the others will join. This is certainly not a "war machine" against any country or alliance. It is the continuation of the European construction. In the process most member states will, in a EU framework, regain their lost capacity to think strategically, to understand a crisis strategically and if necessary to protect the collective interest of the EU with an unsurpassed efficiency. This will greatly enhanced the overall capacity of the Atlantic alliance.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Chirac, interview with *The New York Times*, September 22, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Internal document approved at the Berlin meeting between Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder, September 20, 2003, "Blair backs more EU defence co-operation", Bertrand Benoit, Ben Hall, *Financial Times*, September 22, 2003.

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